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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the actual content and use of Indian vocabulary in standard Guatemalan Spanish, as opposed to the numerous entries found in antiquated dictionaries. Over 600 Indian words were extracted from contemporary Guatemalan literature and Lisandro Sandoval's "Semantica guatemalense." Interviews were arranged with middle and upper class speakers of Guatemalan Spanish in Guatemala City and Xelaju, the second largest city. The subjects were divided into four age groups: (1) 14-21, (2) 22-35, (3) 36-50, and (4) 51 and over. Several usage patterns emerged. Approximately 225 words were not recognized by any group. These words are semantically divided into terms for trees, plants, animals, rare insects, fish, Indian clothing, expressions for sick children, kinship, agriculture procedures, chiefs or bosses, the devil, and extinct professions. The oldest group recognized the most Indian words, and each progressively younger group was acquainted with fewer. Vocabulary used by all groups was divided into three groups: (1) Fruits and vegetables: achiote, aguacatal, caimito, camote, piloy, and pozol, (2) Animals: cutete, coyote, pijije, and tacuacin, and (3) Utensils and clothing: caite, comal, guacal and paxte.
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EXTENT AND USE OF INDIGENOUS VOCABULARY IN GUATEMALAN SPANISH

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Current standard Guatemalan Spanish is the result of over four hundred years of linguistic crossbreeding, a process which is continued today by most bilingual speakers. In addition to sparse phonetic and syntactic contributions, these speakers have introduced many new words related to their daily lives and the flora and fauna of the region.

Present-day Guatemala is one of the largest geographical divisions carved out of the colonial Capitanía general de Guatemala (1542-1821), which included the current southern Mexican states of Tabasco and Chiapas, and the republics of Belize (British Honduras), Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Although the entire area contained many local Indian languages, the Toltecs and Aztecs in Mexico began to superimpose¹ their culture and language long before the arrival of the Spaniards.

Today, most Indian languages have been eliminated in Nicaragua and Costa Rica². There are scattered Indian populations in Honduras and El Salvador where the majority of speakers use either Pipil, Miskito or Lenka³.

Guatemala, with proportionately more Indian people than any other Spanish-American country, contains a pure Indigenous population of approximately sixty-five per cent; fifteen per cent

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are bilingual, with the remaining fifty per cent speaking only the native Indian languages among which the most popular are Achí, Agustecan, Cakchiquel, Caribe, Chuy, Ixil, Jacaltecan, Kajobal, Kekchí, Mam, Maya-Quiché, Pokomán and Tzutujil⁴. The other thirty-five per cent, except for a limited number of non-Spanish European bilinguals located in the capital and second largest city, Xelajú, speak Spanish exclusively.

Much work has been done in current Mexican Spanish, but the few works documenting lexical or indigenous contributions to Guatemalan Spanish were written at the end of the nineteenth or at the beginning of the twentieth century⁵. Many words have disappeared; the etymologies of the Indian words given are erroneous or unfounded. Fortunately for historical and comparative reasons these works continue to be useful. Though suffering from the shortcomings presented above, one dictionary is worth mentioning. Lisandro Sandoval's Diccionario de guatemaltequismos, a collector's item published in 1942 contains both Indigenous lexicon and Spanish words and phrases which are either used mainly in Guatemala or have connotations which are understood there only.

A study⁶ (Juan M. Lope Blanch's "Sobre la influencia de las lenguas indígenas en el léxico del español hablado en México") recently published on the Indigenous vocabulary actually used in standard Mexican Spanish as opposed to the hundreds of items found in the numerous dictionaries and glossaries⁷, showed that only about one hundred and sixty Indian words were used actively or passively in standard Mexican Spanish. Simi-

larly, up to this point the true situation of Indigenous vocabulary in Guatemalan Spanish has been badly neglected.

The descriptive updating of this Indian vocabulary necessitated first a listing of the Indian lexicon found in Sandoval's dictionary and those Indian words which were employed by contemporary authors of Guatemalan fiction and non-fiction. Second, the procedure entailed the arranging of interviews, spontaneous or otherwise with Spanish speakers from virtually every Guatemalan class with the exception of the Indian, bilingual and mestizo classes⁸.

During the interviews the actual use and meaning of words were obtained through asking lead questions, e. g. "What do you call a dark hard wood used in furniture making?"; or "What term would you use for a strip of cloth placed on top of the head and used to carry baskets of fruit?" and others. In several interviews the word had to be stated first and then a negative or positive recognition followed. The results of this limited group of words would most appropriately be categorized as passive vocabulary as opposed to the majority of words and meanings which were solicited through lead questions and conversations and which would consequently be considered active vocabulary.

The interviews were conducted with speakers from the two most cosmopolitan centers, Guatemala City and Xela (Quetzaltenango), the second largest city. The interviewees were divided into four age groups: group I (ages 14-21), group II (ages 22-35), group III (ages 36-50) and group IV (ages 51 and

over).

The aforementioned division in groups of four produced several diverse patterns of usage. To begin with the informants of group IV (ages 51 and over) confirmed what had already been suspected, namely that they employed more frequently the Indian vocabulary contained in the basic lexicon list. Group III (36-50), for example, used less than the over-fifty age group, and in several instances they used a newer Indian word in place of the rarer Indian item. Consider for example, the word capi-xay (Sandoval, II, p. 162), 'a round piece of cloth used by the Indians as a support to carry bushels or baskets of fruit and vegetables'; this was recognized and used actively by the oldest group. The thirty-six through fifty age group, on the other hand, called this head support a suyacal (Sandoval, II, p. 634), a word which meant something completely different to the over-fifty age group. Replacing an older Indigenous word with a newer word of Indian origin became the exception, not the rule. Generally speaking, the new word replacement was of Spanish origin. The two younger groups did not recognize the aforementioned suyacal and referred to the object with a semantic description in Spanish, similar to the definition given above in English. The youngest age group proved to use the least number of Indian words. This however should not imply that the oldest group managed quite an extensive Indian vocabulary. Yet, unlike the Mexican-Spanish reduction, group IV recognized and used approximately fifty-four per cent of the Indian vocabulary list. Group III recognized and employed forty-one per cent of

the items. Group II used thirty-nine per cent of the list and group I recognized and used twenty-two per cent.

This phenomena, for literary reasons, seemed rather unfortunate because several nationalistic type pieces of literature included themes based on the Indian or peasant in relation to his problems with life and agriculture. Consequently, a popular, patriotic short story, El mecapal⁹, quite important and alive among the older groups, has become meaningless to the younger groups.

In addition to the decrease in use, the interviews with all age groups revealed several other important linguistic factors. First of all, the definitions recorded in Sandoval did not always correspond to the meaning discussed or advanced by the informant. In fact some had changed quite substantially. A good example is the above-mentioned suyacal.

Secondly, having conducted interviews with representatives from all middle and upper socio-economic classes, those classes almost economically equal to comparable mestizo or Indian classes refused to recognize a word that sounded "very Indigenous". After explaining the project and making them realize that they were not going to be labeled or associated with the mestizo classes, they became more secure and relaxed and acknowledged the existence or their use of the word. This socio-racial reservation is one of several other linguistic-related class restrictions directly or indirectly disclosed during the conversations.

The interviews demonstrated a surprising correlation

to the phenomena among the children of first generation immigrants to the United States in their desire to use correct, if not hypercorrect vocabulary and syntax. Informants from Guatemalan middle and upper-middle classes hesitated to acknowledge their use of an Indigenous form or an extremely familiar form of address: the pronoun vos and its corresponding verb forms. The upper classes of Guatemala used these forms daily without reservation, yet the upper-middle and middle classes generally disregard their existence or use when in the presence of members of either a lower or higher class.

Approximately six hundred items were used to conduct the interviews. Although the lexical morphemes of the words involved were completely Indian in source, several roots contained Spanish suffixes and were included also. The younger groups used words containing Spanish suffixes with the general, originally documented meaning. One example is the word aguacatillo (Sandoval, II, p. 23), 'a type of wood useful in furniture making' according to Sandoval and members of the older groups. The younger age groups realized that the word had something to do with the root aguacate (avocado), but attributed a traditional diminutive meaning to the suffix -illo. Consequently, they defined aguacatillo as a small avocado. In addition, suffixes like -al, -iche and -ote which can be of Spanish or of Indian origin¹⁰ were emitted with typically Spanish denotations.

In terms of geographical-age distinctions, the younger people of Xelaajú (Quezaltenango), knew neither more nor less

than the young group from the capital. In several cases the young Quezaltecans could not recognize a word actively used by all groups in the capital. Take for example the word atoleada (Sandoval, II, p. 23), 'a get together of either family or friends during which the drink atol¹¹ is served. Although this item was completely unknown to the young Quezaltecans, they did recognize vocabulary items like the palm tree buxnay (Sandoval, I, p. 36) and others, which were said to be used primarily in Xelaajú and in the department of Quezaltenango.

Both young Quezaltecans and Guatemalans recognized and used in several cases the Indian root of a word, e. g., ayote, 'a vegetable similar to acorn squash'. However, a derivative like ayotal (Sandoval, I, p. 98), in which case the suffix is of Spanish or of Indian origin¹² meant absolutely nothing to them. Ayotal, a plantation of ayotes, was unidentifiable either because the informants were urban in experience or because it had entered Spanish as an Indian cultural-linguistic phenomena. Another example of this type is the word cacaste, recognized by all groups; and cacastada (Sandoval, I, p. 141), 'the contents of what can fit in a cacaste or basket', was used only by the two older groups.

In several cases the reverse situation occurred involving the possible recognition of both root and suffix. Consider the derivative catizumbada (Sandoval, I, p. 172). Although they recognized and used the derivative, the root, catizumba¹³, was unknown to the two younger groups.

Various items have had to be temporarily discarded be-

cause several respondents recognized and used a word, but they would add that they had learned it in El Salvador, or that it was used principally in Mexico, e. g., cipote (Sandoval, I, p. 183), 'a young boy'.

Approximately two hundred and twenty-five words were not recognizable by any group. Group IV (ages 51 and over) recognized and used about three hundred and seventy-five words, just fifty items more than group III (ages 36-50). Group III recognized and employed only fifteen more words than group II (ages 22-35). Group II used one hundred and seventy-five more words than Group I (ages 14-21)¹⁴.

Group I, which in terms of actual use includes the three older groups, actively used a total of one hundred and thirty-five words. This active vocabulary of Indian origin is the most common to Guatemalan Spanish speakers. Examples of the types of lexical items follow:

a. Fruits and vegetables.

achiote, 'a type of squash'.

aguacatal, 'the avocado tree'.

caimito, 'a tropical fruit'.

camote, 'a type of sweet potato similar to the yam'.

piloy, 'a type of dark brown bean'.

pozol, 'corn which is ground'.

b. Animals.

cutete, 'a non-poisonous reptile'.

coyote, 'coyote'.

pijije, 'a type of wild duck'.

tacuacín, 'a type of large crow which eats corn'.

c. Articles used for clothing and those used in the home.

caite, 'a sandal worn by Indians and lower classes'.

comal, 'a layer of clay which is heated to cook the tortillas' which are eaten daily in Guatemala.

guscal, 'a type of clay vessel used to drink water'.

paxte, 'a glove-type wash cloth made of the dried fibers of an abundant variety of watermelon'.

It should be noted that most of the examples above have entered Spanish from the Toltec-Aztec languages. Other words are Central-American Indian in origin, e. g., cux¹⁵ and paca-ya (Sandoval, II, p. 179).

Several words of the lexicon were unable to be placed into the four age categories because the evidence was not generalized enough to categorize them.

The two hundred and twenty-five words which were not recognized can be semantically divided into trees, plants, animals, rare insects, fish, Indian-type articles of clothing, expressions for sick children, kinship terms, various aspects of the agricultural preparation of land, terms for chiefs or bosses, the devil or other mythical deities, professions that no longer exist, e. g., jungle guides.

I would like to conclude with one of the most interesting linguistic results which had been directly exposed by the interviews; namely that in Guatemalan Spanish there is linguistic evidence enough to add another phoneme to the usual number

of phonemes in Guatemalan Spanish.

Having been preexposed to the sound ɣ in a few Guatemalan Spanish words, the interviews confirmed, not only their existence, but the use of other words which are written with orthographic x and pronounced with the phone [ɣ]. Unlike initial x in Mexican Spanish (cf. the pronunciation of xicales/hikáles/, xicotenga/hikoténga/ and Xochimilco/sočimilko/), the following commonly used words are actualized with the voiceless palatal fricative in Guatemala:

xeca, a black bread used daily in Guatemala.

xocomil, a strong wind which blows over Lake Atitlán.

xola, the head; possibly a variant of Andalusian chola.

xolco, ca, a person who is lacking one or more toe.

and in the masculine form it refers to a type of jar.

xolón, na, refers to a person who has large upper extremities.

xolotón, na, a variant of xolón, na.

xuco, ca, refers to anything which is decomposing and consequently has an unpleasant odor; in the western part of the country the masculine form designates a type of pungent tamal.

xuquearse, to become sour or pungent; enxucarse.

xute, designates a sharp point, a person who meddles into the affairs of others, and the "anus".

Although several criteria should be used to determine whether or not [ɣ] can be categorized as a phoneme, along with paxte¹⁶ (contrasting with the imperative paste from pastar),

five of the nine entries form minimal pairs with other commonly used Central-American Spanish words, e. g., xeca/seca, xola/sola, xolón/tolón, xuca/yuca and xute/tute. These pairs, as a result, pose the question of whether or not the phone [ʃ] should be considered a phoneme in Guatemalan Spanish. Future investigation of Central-American Spanish may indeed provide an answer.

NOTES

¹Gary Eugene A. Scavnicky, "Los 'sufijos' no españoles y las innovaciones sufijales en el español centroamericano," Thesaurus XXIX (January-April, 1974), p. 69.

²Alfredo Costales Samaniego, Diccionario de modismos y regionalismos centroamericanos (San José, n. d.), p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 4.

⁴Idem.

⁵Examples of these works follow:

Antonio Batres Jáuregui, El castellano en América. Guatemala, 1904.

Hildebrando A. Castellón, Diccionario de nicaraguanismos. Managua, 1939.

Juan Fernández Ferraz, Nahuatlismos de Costa Rica. San José, 1892.

Carlos Gagini, Diccionario de barbarismos y provincialismos de Costa Rica. San José, 1892-93.

Antonio José Irisarri, Cuestiones filológicas. Guatemala, 1862.

Adrian Recinos, Adivinanzas recogidas en Guatemala. San Salvador, 1925.

Salomón Salazar García, Diccionario de provincialismos y barbarismos centroamericanos. San Salvador, 1910.

Lisandro Sandoval, Semántica guatemalense, o diccionario de guatemaltequismos. 2 Volumes. Guatemala, 1942.

⁶Juan M. Lope Blanch, "Sobre la influencia de las lenguas indígenas en el léxico del español hablado en México," in Actas del segundo congreso internacional de hispanistas del Instituto español de la Universidad de Nimega (1965), pp. 396.

⁷In addition to Santamaría's works, one dictionary devoted to aztequismos is worth mentioning: Cecilio A. Robelo, Diccionario de aztequismos. México, n. d.

⁸I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities which awarded me a summer stipend to carry out the interviews in Guatemala during the summer of 1973.

⁹Gabriel Angel Castañeda, El mecapal. Guatemala, n. d.

¹⁰Scavnicky, pp. 87-99.

¹¹Central-American Spanish equivalent of Mexican atole, a hot drink made of milk, sugar, ground corn and cinnamon.

¹²Richard L. Predmore, "El sufijo -al en el español de Guatemala," Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica VI(1952), p. 143.

¹³The root, catizumba (Sandoval, I, p. 172) refers to a crowd of persons or things.

¹⁴The actual totals for all groups are: Group I, 135 words; Group II, 310 words; Group III, 325 words; Group IV, 375 words.

¹⁵Cux-/kuš/ (Sandoval, I, p. 251) refers to a type of palm tree similar to the amate in Mexico.

¹⁶Paxte-/pášte/ is defined by Sandoval (p. 251) as a "curbitáceas y seca esponja para el baño".